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| Soo Keun, Park [박수근] (1914-1965) |
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| Park Soo-Keun is one of the most popular Korean painters of modern times. A self-taught artist, he graduated with only an elementary school education and received no regular art classes. However, from an early age, he wanted to become an artist like Jean Francois-Millet whose paintings he saw in art books. The artist is known to have said, "I have a very ordinary philosophy on art that is an artist should paint the goodness and truthfulness in people. So the people I paint are of humble origins rather than diverse and complex. My favorite subjects are grandfathers, grandmothers, and young children, the ordinary people we find in our households." Indeed, his paintings are as honest and candid as are his words. He experimented with various techniques to develop his own texture. He would cover his drawing board with canvas and then apply heavy layers of white, brown and black. Taking influence from Buddhist pagodas and statues, he would paint people on top of this thickly built texture with the effect of making them look as if they were painted on rock. His figures thus grew gradually flatter, buried in the thick texture he had crafted as the composition became more condensed. |
| Park Soo-Keun is one of the most popular Korean painters of modern times. A self-taught artist, he graduated with only an elementary school education and received no regular art classes. However, from an early age, he wanted to become an artist like Jean Francois-Millet whose paintings he saw in art books. The artist is known to have said, "I have a very ordinary philosophy on art that is an artist should paint the goodness and truthfulness in people. So the people I paint are of humble origins rather than diverse and complex. My favorite subjects are grandfathers, grandmothers, and young children, the ordinary people we find in our households." Indeed, his paintings are as honest and candid as are his words. He experimented with various techniques to develop his own texture. He would cover his drawing board with canvas and then apply heavy layers of white, brown and black. Taking influence from Buddhist pagodas and statues, he would paint people on top of this thickly built texture with the effect of making them look as if they were painted on rock. His figures thus grew gradually flatter, buried in the thick texture he had crafted as the composition became more condensed.  Prior to liberation from Japanese colonial rule Park’s work mostly favored farmers as his subjects, but after the Korean War, his interest shifted to the urban working class and the petit bourgeois. The city of Seoul in the post-war years captivated the artist in Park. Jobless men gathered in small groups on street sides and exchanged small talk as they had little else to do. The war also brought a big change in the role of women, who broke out of their traditional domain in the home and began working, often occupying the streets that had previously been considered as masculine territory.  From the 1950s until his death in 1965, Soo-Keun Park produced a body of works that can be generally classified into three groups according to subject. The first group features houses alone or next to a small street. Then, there are paintings of women, on their way somewhere with a bundle over their head, peddling small goods by the street or at the market, or washing clothes by the stream. Finally, there are the leafless trees amongst which women walk.  Things took a favorable turn from 1959 when Park’s paintings began to be sold in small numbers at Bando Gallery located inside the Bando Hotel (currently known as Lotte Hotel). The clientele was mostly American soldiers and civilians who either visited or stayed at the hotel. This helped the cash-strapped artist to devote himself more freely to his artistic endeavors until he died in 1965, of stomach cancer.   File: bull.jpg  Figure 1 *Children and a Bull*, 1962, oil on canvas, 116.8 x 72 cm  Source: http://leeum.samsungfoundation.org/html\_eng/exhibition/exhibition\_view.asp |
| Further reading:  (Gallery Hyundai)  (Youngna) |